

ALASKA MARINE HIGHWAY

— 50TH ANNIVERSARY —

Holiday Spirit Underway

Perhaps none exemplified holiday spirit more than the Alaska Marine Highway's procurement officer, Russ Hansen, and his lovely wife, Linda, dressing in full regalia as Santa and Mrs. Clause, riding the *Aurora* and *Le Conte* to each remote village we served in Southeast Alaska: Metlakatla, Hollis, Kake, Angoon, Tenakee Springs, Hoonah, and Pelican.

In December, in the weeks leading up to Christmas, our ship, decorated with Christmas finery, had a Christmas tree in the Purser's Foyer, and Christmas lights hoisted aloft on flag halyards from after mast. We carried Santa and Mrs. Clause on the *Aurora* without their reindeer to Metlakatla, on Annette Island. A large throng of mothers, fathers and their excited children met the ship upon arrival. Whisking Santa and Mrs. Clause away into town atop a fire truck like conquering heroes amid honking horns, blaring sirens, and emergency lights flashing. A parade of vehicles followed the fire truck and the guests of honor to the community center for personal interviews with the Clauses.

At Hollis, on Prince of Wales Island, our arrival was quieter, but word quickly got around that Santa was at the ferry terminal onboard the *Aurora*. As though appearing magically from the depths of the rainforest, local children from all around came down to the ship with their mothers and fathers in tow for their personal visit and interview with Mr. and Mrs. Clause. Sitting in large chairs in the Purser's Foyer, Russ and his wife had the right words for each child. The kids loved it, as well as their parents. Each child had the opportunity to meet Santa and his wife individually.

On these special occasions, my wife and two children traveled on the *Aurora* with the Clauses to Hollis and back. Russ and Linda, a wonderful, delightful



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couple, playing the part so well, making December a special time of the year filled with fond memories of life onboard that fine ship. It was a profound pleasure to have dinner with my family and Mr. and Mrs. Clause in the officer's mess room on the *Aurora*, especially in anticipation of having a real chef, Dan Gagnon, as our holiday relief chief cook.



Captain Hopkins with Russ and Linda Hansen, aka Santa and Mrs. Clause in the Purser's Foyer on the *Aurora* with his wife Wynn and their children, Katie and Paul. c. 1993

A ship never stops for a holiday, but continues its work around the clock. There are times when a shipmaster is not at home for the holidays. Many of the assigned crew will go on vacation to be home with their families and a relief crew will take their place. A captain, however, is not as fortunate. There are only so many captains to go around.

Often there is no relief captain available to relieve a permanent captain so he can be home for a holiday.

Such was the case for Thanksgiving, 1997, when Dan Gagnon, gratefully dispatched to the *Aurora* to be our relief chief cook, make his presence known with his deep voice, carrying a large sea bag over his large shoulders, often bringing his own cooking equipment onboard.

We knew we were in for a treat. Dan, known throughout the Alaska Marine Highway fleet as our best cook, was an inventive and imaginative chef producing outstanding menus. Blessed with wonderful cooks, the Alaska Marine Highway has a cadre of professional cooks. Among these, however, Dan had been to culinary school and was a highly trained professional in the culinary arts, enjoying his work, and making the results fun for the crew.



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Before Dan walked into the *Aurora*'s galley, our Chief Steward nervously reminded Dan, "This is a meat and potato crew," implying that Dan should not get too fancy, perhaps worrying about the cost to the ship's budget. Dan smiled and went to work calmly, methodically, with a theme of meat and potatoes. Wearing a clean, pressed white uniform of a chef, and a tall chef's hat that seemed to touch the galley overhead, Dan huddled with his assistants. Writing out his instructions and supply requests on clipboards, Dan issued his orders. From then on, the *Aurora*'s galley came to life and was a beehive of activity.

Wonderful smells wafted throughout the ship carried by the relative wind and the ship's ventilation system, drifting astern over our wake as we crossed Clarence Strait to Hollis. We could only guess what those aromas might be. Our Chief Steward checked in from time to time to observe the progress taking place in his galley, and, smiling, made no objections.

Waiting with eager anticipation, crew morale soared, and appetites grew hungrier. Finally, clearing the tables, place mats and cutlery were set in the crew and officer's mess rooms, the magic hour for dinner had arrived. In Dan's style, Thanksgiving dinner came on time fresh and piping hot from the nearby galley.

Chef Dan's 1997 Thanksgiving Day Dinner on the *Aurora*:

Soup:	Chicken & Spinach
Entrees:	Turkey with Cornbread and Wild Cranberry Dressing
	Roast Goose
	Baked Corn-Fed Ham
	Honey-Orange-Cayenne Sweet Potato
	Real Mashed Potatoes



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Captain's Request:	Fresh Oyster Stew
Salad Bar:	Dan's Famous Ribbon Jell-O
Vegetables:	Creamed Peas & Onions
	Fresh Carrots
Deserts:	Low-Bush Cranberry Cheesecake
	Blueberry Cheesecake
	Sweet Potato Pie
	Mincemeat Pie
	Apple Pie
Special Treat:	Frozen, hand-carved, rose-petal chocolates

Thank you, Russ, Linda, and Dan, for enhancing our lives and bringing excellence to our ship.

Written and Photograph Provided by Captain Bill Hopkins, AMHS Retired

